DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 110 376 SO 008 499

AUTHOR Rehberg, Richard A.; Rosenthal, Evelyn
TITLE Social Class and Its Comparative Impact on a Set of Selected School Process Variables at the High School Level: A Multi-Study Analysis. Working Draft.
PUB DATE 75
NOTE 19p.; A paper presented for the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Washington, D.C., April 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Academic Ability; *Academic Achievement; *Educational Discrimination; Educational Research; Educational Sociology; Equal Education; Failure Factors; Secondary Education; *Social Class; Social Differences; *Social Discrimination; *Socioeconomic Influences; Student Characteristics; Student School Relationship

ABSTRACT

The effect of social class on progress of the individual student through school is examined in this research report. Based upon data from a range of studies, this investigation assesses the magnitude of the effects of class origins, scholastic ability, and a select number of other variables on (1) curriculum location, (2) participation in extracurricular activities, (3) level of student educational expectation, (4) level of educational encouragement accorded the student by counselors and teachers, and (5) teacher grades or academic performance. The results indicate that contrary to current revisionist thought there is little evidence to support a contention that social class has a strong effect on the progress of the individual high school student. Social class was not the source of largest effect on any of the five criterion measures. Other variables, including scholastic ability, interpersonal influence from parents and peers, and the personal educational objective of the student himself, had a larger influence upon school progress. (Author/DE)

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SOCIAL CLASS AND ITS COMPARATIVE IMPACT ON A SET OF SELECTED SCHOOL PROCESS VARIABLES AT THE HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL: A MULTI-STUDY ANALYSIS

by

Richard A. Rehberg

and

Evelyn Rosenthal

Dapartment of Sociology
State University of New York at Binghamton
Binghamton, New York

S0008499

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Presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, 1975.

INTRODUCTION

In its 1971 decision on Serrano v. Priest, the Supreme Court of the State of California argued that education be treated as a "fundamental interest" along with the right to vote and to legal counsel. In support of that argument, the judges held that in American society, education is. . .

> essential in maintaining what several commentators have termed "free enterprise democracy"--that is, preserving an individual's opportunity to compete successfully in the economic market place, despite a disadvantaged background. Accordingly, the public schools of this state are the bright hope for entry of the poor and oppressed into the mainstream of American society (cited in Greenbaum, 1971:522).

Whether and to what degree "the public schools . . . are the bright hope for entry of the poor and oppressed into the mainstream of American society" is the issue which provides the broad context for this paper. Defined more narrowly and precisely, the focal point of our interest is one that has occupied social scientists for decades: the relationship of schooling to social class. Specifically, we shall survey the evidence from a number of studies, including our own, in an effort to estimate the degree to which the progress of the individual student through the schools is dependent upon his social class or origin.

Three fairly distinct positions on this issue can be identified:

The first position is distinctly a minority position. It holds that the relationship between schooling and class background is weak, trivial, or minimal. Beverly Duncan expressed this position in these words when, reflecting on the rather small (circa 30 percent) percentage of variance in the educational attainment of a national probability sample of adult males which was accounted for by four background variables, including family head's occupation and education, she observed

> . . . that the relation of schooling to social background is sufficiently loose that a boy's attainment is not strictly determined or even sharply limited by the circumstances of the family into which he is born (1967:371).

The second position has many advocates. Progress through the school does depend upon class origin, this position argues, but the magnitude of that dependence is not large by any absolute standard. Furthermore, progress through the schools depends also on such "merit" constructs as scholastic ability and while the magnitude of that dependence also is not large by any absolute standard, it is often held to be as large or larger than that of the schooling and social class dependency An excerpt from Otis Dudley Duncan should illustrate the theme of this position:

> /T/he American ideal of equal educational opportunity is realized in the white population to the extent that progress through the grades of the school system is influenced at least as much by how bright you are as by "who" you are; that the latter, indexed by measures of family size and status, does make a substantial difference in educational outcome apart from its correlation with intelligence, is an indication that the ideal is far from being completely realized at this time (1968:8).

The third position is one that has its roots in some of the early and pioneering studies of schooling and social class, studies such as Hollingshead's Elmtown's Youth. It is a position which views the progress of the individual through the school as highly dependent upon his class origins. Kenneth Clark put the brief this way when he wrote that "American public schools have become significant instruments in the blocking of economic mobility and in the intensification of class distinctions (1968:101)". Patricia Cayo Sexton has phrased her indictment of the schools in this manner: "If you know a child's class status, . . . you can quite accurately predict what will happen to him in school and how successful he will be (1961:42)".

Within the last ten years or so, this third position has been argued even more vigorously and with much enthusiasm and insight by such scholars of a Marxist orientation as Herbert Gintis, Samuel Bowles, Martin Carnoy, and Michael Katz. Sparked in part by the less than successful efforts to use the schools as vehicles for the upward social mobility of the poor during the War on Poverty and by a

growing disenchantment with American institutions accentuated by the Viet Nam war, the articulate proponents of this thesis argue as does Martin Carnoy that it is misleading to claim that formal education in the Western world "acts to offset social inequities and inefficiencies by being an objective selector of intelligent and rational individuals (1974:3)", or, as the revisionist historian, Michael Katz, has phrased the issue, schooling has not been the "great democratic engine for identifying talent and matching it with opportunity", rather, it has been an institutional process which treats "children as units to be processed into particular shapes and dropped into slots roughly congruent with the status of their parents (1971:xviii)".

Two of these three positions locate the central task of our analysis. These are the second and the third positions, that is--

1. The perspective which recognizes (and deplores) the fact that progress through the school depends to a degree upon class origin but that the magnitude of this dependency is not large by any absolute standard and that furthermore such progress depends at least as much if not more so on such merit criteria as scholastic ability. We shall refer to this position as that of the meritocratic thesis.

2. The perspective which views schools as truly class-biased institutions in which the progress of the individual is heavily contingent upon his social class origin. Inasmuch as many advocates of this view believe that the social history of schooling in America need be revised, we shall refer to this position as that of the revisionist thesis.

Too much evidence on the impact of class on schooling exists for us to consider seriously the first position, that is, the view that schooling and class are so weakly associated as to be all but independent.

The criterion measures which we shall use to estimate and compare the effects of class origin and of scholastic ability are all elements in a common set formed by the intersection of the meritocratic and revisionist theses. These measures are

1. Curriculum location, i.e., being or not being in a program of studies which prepares the student for college.

2. Participation in extra-curricular activities.

3. Level of student educational expectation, i.e., the realistic educational goal which the student intends or plans to pursue upon completion of secondary school.

4. Level of educational encouragement from the counselor, i.e., the educational goal which the student reports he is encouraged to pursue by his guidance counselor.

5. Academic performance, i.e., teacher assigned grades.

Two "bookkeeping" notes before we proceed to an evaluation of the data:

1. Throughout our presentation, social class is usually defined and measured by the occupational or educational achievements of the student's head of the household (usually the father), or by some weighted combination of those two measures. Scholastic ability is usually indexed by the student's score on a standardized exam of ability or achievement, but usually the former. And, since we access data from several rather than from just one source, unless we note otherwise the data we report are for males. Regretably, fewer authors provide data specific to both males and females than to just males only. Between study comparisons thus necessitate reference to that sex for which more data have been reported: males.

2. Because the revisionist scholars have been somewhat more specific than have the advocates of the meritocratic position in identifying what they regard to be the key school process variables by which class comes to be the primary axis of selection and differentiation, we shall refer more often than not to the revisionists than to the meritocraticists as we develop the various arguments.

3. Inasmuch as most of the relevant studies of schooling and social class have been done at the secondary level most of our references shall be to high school students.

ARGUMENTS AND DATA

Curriculum

Through, but not much beyond the turn of the century, a homogeneous, mostly classical, curriculum served a homogeneous, mostly upper middle and upper class student body. But a rapidly industrializing and urbanizing nation with an ex-

panding economy brought with it a new clientele to be served by the nation's secondary schools. Trow (1961) describes these new students whom secondary education was to serve during the era of mass terminal secondary schooling:

> Many of the new students in school were in school unwillingly, in obedience to the new or more stringent state compulsory education laws; many came from poor, culturally impoverished homes and had modest vocational goals; many of these were the sons and daughters of recent immigrants, and seemed to observers very much in need of "Americanization". These new students posed new problems for secondary education; and these problems, and the answers which they engendered, transformed public secondary education, its philosophy, and its curriculum.

Differentiation of the student body forced differentiation of the secondary school curriculum. As Coleman has written, the idea inherent in the restructuring of the secondary school program . . .

> appears to have been to take as given the diverse occupational paths into which adolescents will go after secondary school and to say (implicitly): there is greater equality of opportunity for a boy who is not going to attend college if he has a specially designed curriculum than if he must take a curriculum designed for college entrance (1968:13).

But often the educational plans of the individual student are too indefinite, too vague, to use as a basis for curriculum assignment. On what criterion, then, is such a decision to be made? The liberal response to this question is that the criterion is to be one of merit, that is, of scholastic ability. A Michigan educator in 1921:

> We can picture the educational system as having a very important function as a selecting agency, a means of selecting the men of the best intelligence from the deficient and mediocre. All are poured into the system at the bottom; the incapable are soon rejected or drop out. . . and pass into the ranks of unskilled labor. . . . The more intelligent who are to be clerical workers pass into the high school; the most intelligent enter the universities, whence they are selected for the professions (Pillsbury, 1921:71).

The revisionist interpretation of what actually happens in the nation's schools is that the criterion is not one of merit but rather one of ascription; namely, social class. Martin Carnoy:

> The lower-social class children, because of their poorer grades, end up in the vocational track, thus being guaranteed an occupation as a factory worker or technician. Wealthier children enter the academic track, which gives them access to white-collar roles or to a university and the professions (1974:324).

Rhetoric aside, when we look at the data which have been amassed over the past ten to fifteen years on curriculum location, we learn that (a) we know very little about the determinants of which students end up in which program of study; (b) of the little that we do know the evidence is rather persuasive that ability is more influential than social class as a predictor of curriculum location.

1. We know very little:

   a. Using the occupation and education of the father as her measures of class and adding number of siblings as a third family background measure, Heyns, with the Coleman data, was able to explain less than a third of the variance in the curriculum location of twelfth grade students (Heyns, 1974).

   b. With our own data from 2788 ninth grade youth from New York's southern tier region, we are able to explain less than one-quarter of the variance in curriculum location using four predictor variables: (1) an aggregate of social class based on the occupation and education of the father and the education of the mother, (2) scholastic ability, (3-4) two measures of the family educational environment.

   c. Kerckhoff, in a very recent paper, reports a multiple coefficient of determination of c. .30 for the curriculum location of American students using father's occupation and education, family size, and ability as predictor variables. For school type, he reports for the same four predictor variables an R^2 of .29 for British students.

2. We know that ability is the more powerful of the two criteria, i.e., more powerful than class in determining curriculum location:

   a. From their national longitudinal study, Alexander and Eckland (1973) report for males the following curriculum correlations: (1) .27 with mother's education, (2) .27 with father's occupation, (3) .34 with father's education, and (4) .35 with scholastic aptitude.

   b. Heyns summarizes the results of her analysis:

      > The importance of verbal ability in predicting curriculum placement is immediately apparent, with a direct effect of .44. The unique effect of verbal ability on curriculum

placement explains 17.6% of the variance, or slightly less than 65% of the total variance explained. The unique effects of social class explain 3.2% of the total variance in curriculum placement. The joint effects of verbal achievement and social class are somewhat larger, accounting for nearly 25% of the total variance. The total effect of socioeconomic status, however, is still less than the unique effects of tested verbal ability (1974: 1440).

c. In our own study, the total effect of scholastic ability on curriculum, that is the correlation between those two variables, is .29 while that for class was .24. With four predictor variables, class, ability and two measures of family educational environment, the net or direct effect of ability was .21 while that for social class was .13.

d. In Kerckhoff's analysis, the coefficient for American school curriculum regressed on father's occupation was .09, on father's education .18, on family size -.08, and on ability .41! For British school type, the respective coefficients were: .13, .14, -.09, and .40.

Clearly the evidence is persuasive that over the past ten to fifteen years or so whether a student is located in a college-preparatory curriculum or not depends more upon the merit construct of scholastic ability than upon his social class origin!

Participation in Extra-curricular Activities

A diversification of the student body had created the need for a differentiation of the high school curriculum. But the differentiation of the program of study ran counter to a national policy and ideology: that of America as the melting pot and of its schools as a primary means toward that end. How could the school offer simultaneously different programs of study to students from different class and ethnic backgrounds while at the same time nurture in those same students a common ideology and system of beliefs, values, and goals? The solution to this problem lay in the development of a strong program of extra-curricular activities. In the words of the Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education of the NEA, issued in 1918, students:

> through school assemblies and organizations /would/ acquire common ideas. participation of pupils in common activities . . . such as athletic games, social activities, and the government of the school /would provide/ the new training ground for democracy.

But, if participation in those activities was permitted to vary in accord with class origin the amalgamation objective of the extra-curricular program would not be achieved. And this appeared to be precisely what was happening when, for example, Hollingshead noted that in Elmtown the number of activities in which students participated varied positively with their class background. Perhaps, then, it is the relationship of extra-curricular activities to class which leads the revisionists to include participation as one of the mechanisms by which the schools continue to differentiate students in accord with their class origins. Thus, Bowles wrote in 1972 that:

> Class stratification within the schools is achieved through tracking, differential participation in extra-curricular activities. . . (1972:50).

Studies continue to find a positive association between number of activities participated in and social class. However, the association is a rather weak one and several of those same studies show also a positive association between participation and scholastic ability equal to or greater in magnitude than that between participation and class.

a. Hauser (1971:110) reported from his study in the Nashville, Tenn. area a correlation between number of school organizations participated in and:

   1) Occupation of father = .14

   2) Education of father = .17

   3) Intelligence = .17

b. Rehberg has reported from his study of 2788 tenth grade youth from New York a correlation between number of activities and:

   1) The Hollingshead Two Factor Index of Social Class = .15

   2) Scholastic ability = .22

Clearly, then, class is not a strong determinant of the number of extra-curricular activities a student may participate in. Indeed, it seems to be no stronger a determinant than is scholastic ability.

Level of Student Educational Expectation

Numerous studies have established the theoretical and predictive importance of measures of student educational expectations. Haller and Portes report that senior year measures of educational and occupational expectations mediate a good portion of the effect of background variables to actual educational and occupational attainment (1973). Boudon attributes a much larger portion of the inequality in educational attainment to the expectation effects of social stratification than he does to the educationally relevant cultural effects of stratificatio (1973:84-85). Rehberg and Hotchkiss (1972), Alexander and Eckland (1973), and Boyle (1969) each regard expectation as a source of an independent and positive effect on such outcomes as participation, academic performance, level of educational encouragement from the counselor, and ultimate educational attainment.

Proponents of both the meritocratic and the revisionist theses recognize the class-based character of an educational expectation. Where the two sets of protagonists differ is on the strength of the association between expectation and class. Bowles, for example, characterizes the relationship as a strong one:

> The aspirations and expectations of students and parents concerning both the type and amount of schooling are strongly related to social class (1972:58).

Sources of variation in an expectation have been the object of intense investigation. Three general categories of antecedents have been established: (1) class indicators, (2) measures of scholastic ability, and (3) indices of interpersonal influence from (a) parents, and (b) peers. Table 1 displays correlation coefficients from five different studies for the relationships of an expectation with each of these three categories of determinants:

Table 1

Correlation Coefficients for the Relationships between Measures of Educational Expectation and Specified Predictor Variables: Five Studies

Predictor Variable	Williams	Hauser	Sewell & Hauser	Alexander & Eckland	Rehberg
POPOC	.24	.20	.27	.36	.40
POPED	na	.25	.27	.36	.38
MOMED	na	na	.26	.31	.31
SCHOL. ABILITY	.30	.24	.43	.36	.39
PARENT INFLUENCE	.78	.64	.52	.51	.48
PEER INFLUENCE	.45	na	.49	.53	.51

We shall evaluate the rank order of class origin among the determinants of an expectation with reference to both zero-order correlations (as per Table 1) total effects and to standardized regression or path coefficients.

Reference to the zero-order correlations or total effects in Table 1 establishes, without exception, interpersonal influence, either from parents or from peers, as the first and second ranking sources of total effects on expectation; r's range from .48 to .78.

Ability outranks class in its total effect on expectation in two of the studies (Williams, Sewell and Hauser) and is virtually tied with class in the other three studies.

Judged solely on the basis of correlations or total effects, then, class is not the primary determinant of an educational expectation. A secondary determinant --one about equal in total effect to class--is scholastic ability. And, in the magnitude of its total effect, class certainly does not emerge as a strong or powerful determinant of an expectation, not with correlations which range from .20 to .40 and average in the low thirties.

When expectation and its determinants of parental and peer interpersonal influence, class, and ability are analyzed in a multi-variate path mode, the rank ordering of antecedents remains about the same. Sewell and Hauser, Alexander and Eckland, and our own data all establish parents and peers as the two largest sources of direct or net effects on an expectation, with class or ability ranking third or fourth, depending on the particular model and study.

We find little evidence, then, to support the assertion of Bowles that "the aspirations and expectations of students . . . concerning . . . the amount of schooling /is/ strongly related to social class (emphasis added)".

Level of Educational Encouragement from the Counselor or Teacher

In a paragraph in which he summarizes the mechanisms by which schools ostensibly manage to perpetuate among their students the same system of class stratification characteristic of adult society, Bowles cites guidance counselors and teachers as among those school officials who generally expect working-class children to do poorly, to terminate schooling early, and to end up in jobs similar to those of their parents (1972:50).

While Bowles does not inform us whether he believes the relationship between teacher or counselor educational advice or encouragement and student social class to be weak, moderate, or strong, we might take the liberty to infer from the general tone of his writings that the relationship is at least moderate in magnitude, i.e., correlations of .30 to .50.

Requisite data for evaluating this particular argument come from four studies: Heyns' analysis of the Coleman survey, William's Canadian sample, Sewell and Hauser's Wisconsin investigation, and our own New York data. Again--our inferences are derived first from zero-order correlations or total effects and then from standardized regression or path coefficients.

Table 2

Correlation Coefficients for the Relationships between Counselor or Teacher Educational Encouragement and Specified Predictor Variables: Three Studies

Predictor Variables	Williams TEA Gr. 10	Sewell and Hauser TEA: Gr. 12	Rehberg CEA Gr. 12
POPOC	.18	.15	
POPED	na	.15	
MOMED	na	.14	
Class (Hh)			.20
SCHOL. ABILITY	.26	.35	.37
CURRICULUM	na	na	.29
EXPECTATION	.69	.45	.57
ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE	.25	.42	.54

Regretably, Heyns did not publish her zero-order correlations so we shall refer to her analysis only for its conclusion based on a path analysis of counselor encouragement regressed on class, curriculum, and ability. Williams, Sewell and Hauser, and Rehberg do report the minimal number of appropriate correlations. For all three of these studies, the variable with which teacher or counselor encouragement is most strongly associated is the student's own educational expectation (r's .45 to .69). We shall comment on the causality of these relationships momentarily. Academic performance is the variable with which teacher or counselor encouragement has its second strongest zero-order correlation in the Sewell and Hauser (r = .42) and Rehberg (r = .54) studies. Ranked third in its bi-variate association with such educational encouragement is scholastic ability with an r = .35 in the Sewell and Hauser inquiry and an r = .37 in our own study. (In William's data, academic performance and scholastic ability are tied in their zero-order association with teacher encouragement with r's of .25 and .26). Only the Rehberg study reports a correlation between encouragement (counselor) and

curriculum and that r = .29. Unequivocally, social class, regardless of how measured, ranks last as a determinant of educational advice from the teacher or the counselor with a bi-variate r of .18 for Williams, .14 - .15 for Sewell and Hauser, and .20 for Rehberg.

In a multi-variate environment, Heyns' analysis and our own provide estimates of the independent or net effects of class, ability, and other variables on the reported level of encouragement from the counselor. Heyns used two counselor measures: (1) student reported frequency of contact with the counselor, and (2) the amount of perceived encouragement to continue educational training. She concluded from her analysis:

> The net impression is that social class background is mediated within schools primarily by curriculum and verbal ability and does not exert a strong direct influence on either talks or encouragement (1974:1447).

Our own analysis positions senior year reported counselor educational encouragement as dependent upon cumulative grade-point average, sophomore year educational expectation, freshman-year curriculum, and upon social class and scholastic ability.

Cumulative grade point average has the strongest direct effect on counselor encouragement with a path = .30, followed by sophomore year educational expectation with a path = .24 and by curriculum with a path = .14. Ability has a direct effect of .09 (much of the total effect of ability is mediated by cumulative GPA). The direct effect of social class upon senior year counselor educational encouragement is .05!

Regardless, then, of whether the estimates are total effects from correlations or direct effects from path coefficients, there is little evidence to suggest that class origin is anything but a comparatively weak influence on the

level of perceived educational encouragement from the counselor (or from the teacher). More influential on whether the counselor will advise college or the work force are the student's own academic performance, his own educational plans, his own curriculum location, and his scholastic ability.

Academic Performance

A reading of the early revisionist literature would have led one to infer that these scholars viewed teacher grades or academic performance as rather strongly dependent upon student class origins. Witness, for example, a 1972 excerpt from Bowles: "Given the great social-class difference in scholastic ability . . . (1972:51)". A more recent reading of the revisionist literature suggests that these scholars are susceptible to evidence contrary to their original beliefs. In a 1973 paper, for example, Bowles and Gintis acknowledge that:

> Recent studies . . . indeed indicate a lack of social class or racial bias in school grades: given a student's cognitive attainment, his or her grades seem not to be significantly affected by class or racial origins, at least on the high school level (1973:78).

We seek here only to substantiate the empirical tenability of that acknowledgement.

Table 3

Correlation Coefficients for the Relationships between Teacher Grades and Specified Predictor Variables: Six Studies

Predictor Variable	Hauser	Heyns	Williams	Sewell Hauser	Alexander Eckland	Rehberg
POPOC	c. .13 .17	.15	.15	.13	.22	.20
POPED	c. .15 .18	.16	na	.15	.24	.21
MOMED	na	na	na	.14	.12	.17
SCHOL. ABILITY	.40	.37	.34	.56	.49	.55

We have reviewed six studies which reported correlations between teacher grades (academic performance) and various measures of social class and scholastic ability. We marvel at the consistency of the data--despite between-study differences in date of the study, in sample composition, and in measures. In each and all of these studies:

1. The range of the correlations of academic performance with various occupational and educational indicators of social class is from .13 to .45.

2. The range of the correlations of academic performance with scholastic ability is from .34 to .56 with a median at .45.

Finally, in a preliminary path model in which we regressed high school cumulative grade point upon sophomore educational expectation, freshman-year curriculum, social class and scholastic ability, class had no significant direct effect upon academic performance! The largest direct effect was from scholastic ability ($p = .37$), followed by sophomore expectation ($p = .35$).

CONCLUSION

The effect of social class on the progress of the individual student through school is a subject with a long history of debate and research in the social sciences.

Schools, within the American ideal, are organizations which function in accord with meritocratic principles: the progress of the student is to be governed more by his ability and his ambition than by his social class.

Challenges to the fact of these meritocratic principles have been prevalent throughout the history of American education. With the emergence of Marxist oriented critical theorists such challenges have been particularly strident and compellingly provocative over the past decade or so. Schools, these scholars assert, are class-biased institutions and have always been so. Now and in the

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past, the critical theorists charge, the social class origins of the student have been one of the strongest determinants of how well and how far he will progress within the educational system. In their view, the social history and conception of schooling in this capitalistic society warrants, indeed demands, substantial revision.

In their criticism and revision of the conception of schooling in American society, the revisionist scholars focus on a number of school process variables which they construe as operative leverage points by which the schools discriminate and differentiate students in accord with their class origins. Included among those process variables are: (1) curriculum, (2) participation in extra-curricular activities, (3) level of student educational expectation, (4) level of educational encouragement accorded the student by guidance counselors and teachers, and (5) teacher grades or academic performance.

With data from a range of studies, mostly of secondary school students, executed at various times and places over the past twenty years in both the United States and Canada, we have sought to assess the magnitude of the effect of class origins, of scholastic ability, and of a select number of other variables, on each of these five school process measures. From that assessment we have concluded:

1. There there is little if any evidence to support a contention that social class, however measured, has a strong effect on the progress of the individual student, at least through high school. Typically, the total effect of class on each of our five criterion measures, estimated with the correlation coefficient, was in the range of .20 to .35. Hardly qualifying for the descriptor of "strong", such coefficients indicate that class itself seldom accounts for anything more than one-eight of the variance in any of these five measures.

2. That for none of the five criterion measures was social class the source of the largest total effect, estimated by the zero-order correlation coefficient, or the largest direct effect, estimated by a standardized regression coefficient. In each and every comparison, the rank order of social class was below that of other pertinent determinants of the particular criterion process measure.

3. That frequently variables other than class exert more effect, both total and direct, on critical school process measures. Included among those other variables are scholastic ability, interpersonal influence from parents or peers, and the personal educational objective of the student himself.

In our discussion of the relationship between teacher grades and social class, we noted that the revisionists have modified substantially their former position to the point where they now recognize that there is little if any empirical support for their previous contention that teacher grading or academic performance is strongly biased or influenced by the student's class background--at least not at the secondary level.

We trust that a further review of the schooling literature on related school process variables such as those we have chosen for discussion in this paper will precipitate corresponding modifications in the revisionist position with regard to social class and schooling--at the level of the individual student.

Many of the Marxist criticisms of and insights into the structure and operation of American society we evaluate as well founded and provocative. If such trenchant criticisms can but succeed in triggering a substantial restructuring of our society then perhaps we can all live more meaningful and productive lives. Certainly, class is a pervasive and often pernicious influence in an industrial society. An exaggeration of its importance in the school, however, may well serve to deflect energies away from other and more basic institutions where reform is not only more needed but where reform may be more consequential for the entire social system.